

# **ABSTRACT**

A method of removing a hard mask layer from a patterned layer formed over an underlying layer, where the hard mask layer is removed using an etchant that detrimentally etches the underlying layer when the underlying layer is exposed to the etchant for a length of time typically required to remove the hard mask layer, without  
5 detrimentally etching the underlying layer. The hard mask layer is modified so that the hard mask layer is etched by the etchant at a substantially faster rate than that at which the etchant etches the underlying layer. The hard mask layer is patterned. The patterned layer is etched to expose portions of the underlying layer. Both the hard mask layer and the exposed portions of the underlying layer are etched with the etchant, where the  
10 etchant etches the hard mask layer at a substantially faster rate than that at which the etchant etches the underlying layer, because of the modification of the hard mask layer.

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